New evidence on the question of whether or not Codex Sinaiticus is a 19th-century fake

*Note: I have attempted (loosely) to write this short note in an informal style similar to the style David Daniels uses (including the generous use of **bold**) because in one sense, he and I have the same desired audience.*

Introduction

In December 2018, I posted a review of David W. Daniels' book, *Is the "World's Oldest Bible" a Fake?* (Ontario, CA: Chick Publications, 2017). I thought there would be a response from someone in that crowd, but I have yet to see one. Daniels assured me that his Vlog 250 (linked below) was not made in response to anything I or anyone else has written, but he made a couple of comments that I think are worth noting.

That video, titled "Satan's Plans Are Unraveling" (Vlog 250 on the Chicktracts YouTube channel), can be found here, at https://youtu.be/d3BuLkN0EtE.

The main thing that Daniels keeps emphasizing is the color of the parchment that shows up in the digital images of Codex Sinaiticus. He claims that the "white" Leipzig images and the "yellow" British Library images prove that the manuscript has been stained to give it a false appearance of age. Several people (some of whom have significantly more experience with manuscripts and digitally imaging them than Daniels and the others who make the same claims about the age of Codex Sinaiticus) have repeatedly urged Daniels and the others to be more careful with this assertion on the grounds that the color standards included in those images do not match. That is to say: **There is good reason to believe that the difference in color that Daniels sees in the images is because the photographs do not give us a true picture of what the manuscript actually looks like.**

Still, Daniels is doubling down on the color. He is putting a significant number of his eggs in the color basket. I admit; it takes a great degree of confidence to be this bold. We would hope that Daniels' confidence is not misplaced.

To be clear, the color is not the *only* issue for Daniels and the rest, but it does seem to be the main one—it's the one that he put on the front cover of his book.

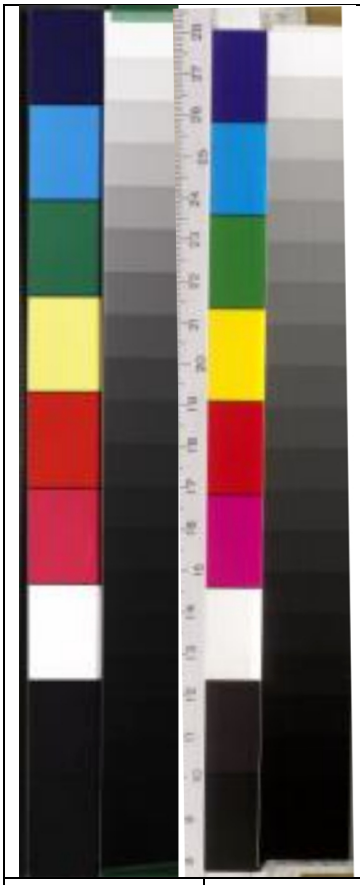
I give a transcription of some of the audio in the video (there are discrepancies between the audio and the captions) of some relevant parts below. Please read these next words carefully:

> **At 2:17**
> "Anyone who tells you these photographers didn't do their job with extreme dedication, I think that person has an agenda. Seriously, they should give up on that kind of slander or libel of these professionals. I have nothing but respect for them. They worked really hard to give us beautifully detailed photos of each page of the Sinaiticus parchments."

At 4:13
"Don't blame the photographers. They had a whole list of rules to follow to ensure accuracy. These guys were smart. Don't blame the cardboard the animal skins were set on. Don't blame the equipment. You don't think these scientific professionals who do this for a living hadn't thought of that? Of course they have."

One piece of evidence that Daniels does not deal with, however, is the discrepancies in the color standards in in the images of Codex Sinaiticus. **Comparing the color standards in the Leipzig and British Library images, the lights are lighter and the darks are darker.** I have seen responses from Steven Avery, one of Daniels' co-researchers, who asserts that this difference is not enough to account for the difference we see in the parchment colors (i.e. the front of Daniels' book):

One **professional manuscript photographer** I spoke to, **who does this for a living**, described Daniels' neglect of the discrepancies of the color standards as like "putting a ruler next to something and then ignoring the readings of the ruler." As much trust as Daniels and the others have put in the photographers of Codex Sinaiticus on the grounds that they are professionals who do this for a living, they really should take this objection seriously.



Q.35 f.4v	Q.57 f.6r

To the left is an example of two color charts. Although they might look the same to an inexperienced eye, there are notable differences.

The one on the left is from Q35 f.4v, one of the Leipzig folios.

The one on the right is from Q57 f.6r, one of the British Library folios.

Here is a simple question: What color is it?

What color is the yellow rectangle? It is noticeably lighter in shade in the Leipzig image.

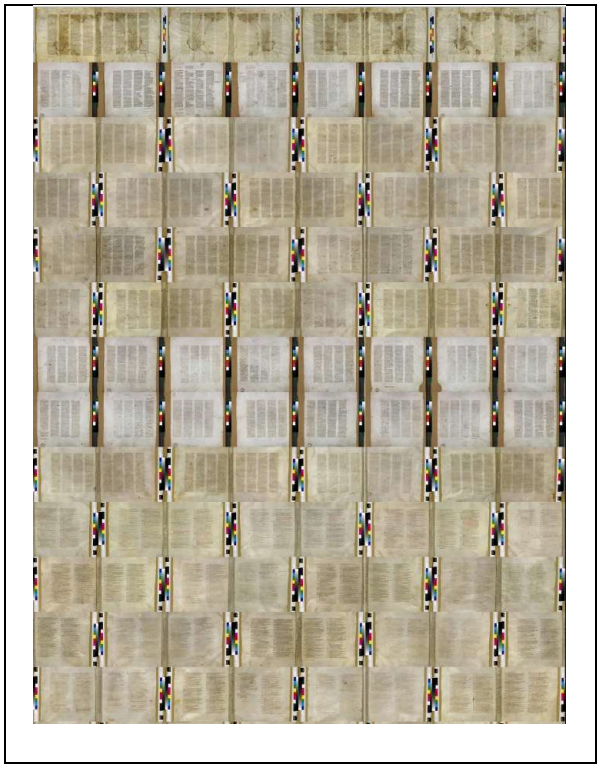
On the other hand, what color is the dark blue rectangle at the top? It is almost black in the Leipzig image.

Look at the shades of grey on the sides, and notice especially the second one from the top. The one on the right is darker than the one on the left.

The point is that these are two **identical** color standards. If they photos were taken and processed in an identical manner, we should not be able to see **any** differences between the one on the left and the one on the right. These are in every standard-light photo of Codex Sinaiticus on the Codex Sinaiticus Project website. By all means, visit the site and double-check me on this: http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx.

That brings me to my **new evidence**, which comprises two parts. The first one is probably the most important.

1. What if we used these color charts to do what Daniels did with the pages of Codex Sinaticus?



To the right, we have a section of Daniels' mosaic of Sinaiticus pages. I took this image directly from what Daniels made, which is posted on the website that claims a 19th-century date for the manuscript (www.sinaiticus.net).

It's easy to see the appeal here. There is obviously a difference in color. If you don't have any experience with manuscripts or photographing manuscripts, and if you already have an agenda against trusting Codex Sinaiticus as a manuscript of the Greek New Testament, then this is a convincing image.

But keep in mind what others and I have been saying: **the color charts don't match**.

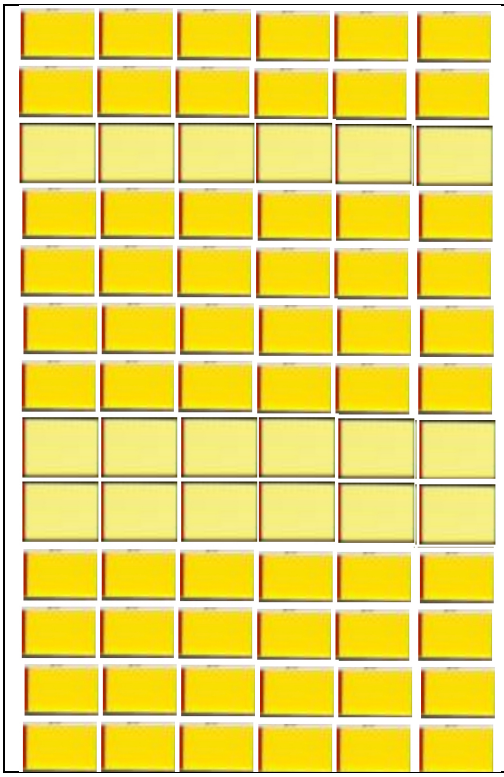
What would happen, then, if we tested Daniels' reconstruction by making one out of the color charts?

Because the color charts are identical, then the colors we will see will be identical **but only if the photography was made identically under identical conditions.** I repeat Daniels' strong words: "Anyone who tells you these photographers didn't do their job with extreme dedication, I think that person has an agenda. Seriously, they should give up on that kind of slander or libel of these professionals."

Let's have a look and see what they look like. In the following images, I took the colors from the two color charts on the previous page. On one hand, the comparison would be better if I took a color sample from each image. On the other hand, it shouldn't matter. If the photographers did their job to the level of precision that Daniels asserts, all of the colors will be identical, no matter which image they come from.

I have not made *any* adjustments to the color, shading, contrast or any other color quality of the following images. I only cropped the rectangles, turned them sideways and pasted them in rows. The color you see is the color they are on the Codex Sinaiticus Project website.

When we take the yellow ones from these two color charts and put them all together, it looks like this:



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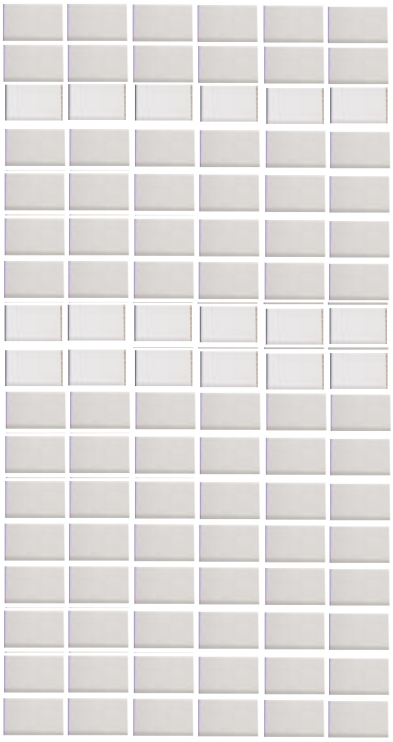
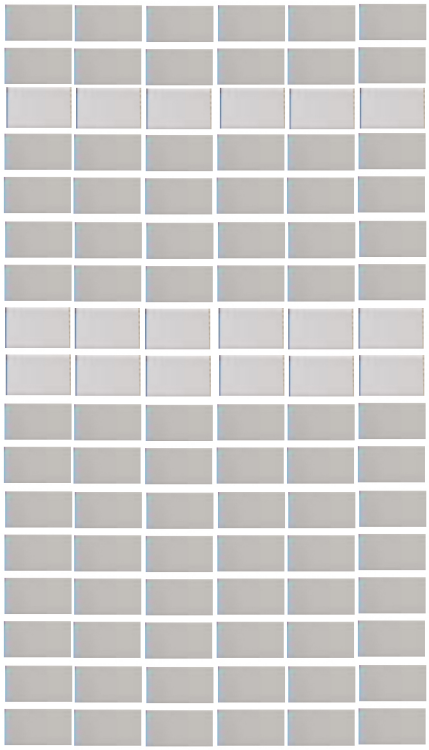
This is the **same yellow square** taken from two different color charts. The darker one is from the color chart on Q57 f.6r (British Library), and the lighter one is from the color chart Q35 f.4v (Leipzig). These two shades of yellow should be **identical** if the photography was done to the level of precision Daniels claims, because they are pictures of identical color charts.

Daniels likes simple questions, and I do too. We can ask a simple question here: *What color is it?*

If we go to the grey side and do the same, we get the lower two results. The mosaic on the left is the second grey square from the top, and the one on the right is the third from the top.

	BL BL Leipzig BL BL BL BL Leipzig Leipzig BL BL BL BL BL BL BL BL	
Second grey rectangle from the top		Third grey rectangle from the top

Again, in each of these images, I used only a single grey rectangle. In each mosaic, the darker rectangles are made from the color chart on Q57 f.6r (British Library), and the lighter rectangles are made from the same respective rectangles but from the color chart on Q35 f.4v (Leipzig).

What color is it?

As much as I like simple questions, some questions and answers aren't simple. Sometimes it takes a bit of experience. I wouldn't want to get brain surgery from somebody who just walked in off the street who watched a documentary about autopsies on Netflix once. No, I'd want the doctor who went to medical school, graduated from medical school, studied brain surgery at medical school, read about brain surgery, watched brain surgery and had (recent!) experience doing brain surgery.

Sometimes the answers aren't as simple as we want them to be.

On to the second piece of new evidence.

2. The Raking Light Images

One of the things Daniels' reminds us of in order to claim that the photographers did their job so well is that they had a standardized set of rules to follow at each of the holding institutions. This way, we could get a better idea of what the manuscript looked like despite the fact that it's dispersed among four libraries. These rules that the Codex Sinaiticus photographers had to follow are described here: (http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/project/digitisation.aspx).

The one thing that seems to be forgotten is that the project involved **not one, but two sets of images**.

According to the website:

> "The parchment leaves of Codex Sinaiticus feature many marks on its surface - pricking holes, ruling indentations, as well as many other natural details - which are not easily visible with the 45 degree lighting directed from both sides of the page. The decision was therefore made to digitise each page twice, the second time with a light source at a low angle from a top corner. These are the 'raking light' images which optimise the view of the physical features of the parchment."

With this in mind, we can ask a simple question: **What do the raking light images look like?**

If Daniels is right, and the photography was done identically in all four places, then the raking light images should look very similar.

At first, I wanted to compare the color standards in the raking light images just to see what they looked like. You can imagine my surprise when I found out that the raking light images from the British Library do not include color charts at all. At least, none of the pages I spot-checked had them. However, the images from Leipzig do include them. **Regardless of whether or not color charts are relevant in raking light images, if the photography was done according to the same standards, then why do some images have color charts and others do not?**

Maybe it was just a mistake on the part of one of those libraries, so I decided to check images from the National Library of Russia and St. Catherine's.

Most pages from those institutions that I checked don't have raking light images at all.

Again, I didn't check everything, but the ones I spot-checked didn't even have raking light images. The one exception was Q18 f.3r from St. Catherine's. It *does* have a raking light image for the *recto*, but there isn't a raking light image of the *verso*.

So, we have another simple question. If the complex set of rules dictated that there should have been two images of each page—a standard light and a raking light—when why aren't they there? And why did only one of the two libraries that did raking light images include color charts in them?

Conclusion

Simple questions get simple answers.

The reason that the images look different is because they were not taken with the level of precision that Daniels asserts. That is the **only** explanation for the differences in the color charts and the inconsistencies in the raking light images. If the images were taken with the level of precision that Daniels asserts, we'd have a full set of raking light images that were consistent across all four institutions on whether or not they had color charts. If they were, the individual rectangles on the color charts would match across the board.

Don't get me wrong—I am incredibly thankful for the images of Codex Sinaiticus. They are light years beyond what we have for many other important manuscripts. They really are of excellent quality.

But we can't impose our own ideas about what "excellent quality" is on a project when we don't have experience working in that area.

In short, the images of Codex Sinaiticus do **not** prove that anyone tampered with the color of the manuscript. They do **not** prove that the Leipzig leaves are a different color than the British Library leaves.

Anyone who tells you that they do, I think that person has an agenda.

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Post script: Why am I doing this?

As a Christian, I care about the truth. I especially care about the truth when it affects the Scriptures and the Gospel. It pains me to see my brothers and sisters in Christ deceived by well-intentioned Christians who teach indefensible claims like this.

The other day, I came across a Twitter debate in which someone claimed that Jesus never rose from the grave. He gave the ending of Mark in Codex Sinaiticus as proof (a tactic almost identical to what I have heard numerous times from King James Onlyists who want to reject Codex Sinaiticus!). Rather than reasoning through other evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus (not the least of which would be all the other accounts of it in the New Testament in Codex Sinaiticus!), my brother in Christ, the Twitter-apologist, responded by claiming that Codex Sinaiticus is a Roman Catholic fake, *and he posted David Daniels' mosaic of Sinaiticus leaves as proof.*

It makes me more than upset when I see the Gospel being hindered and people's witness being damaged when they look for answers and are mislead because they found and believed this group who claims that the manuscript is a fake.

"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1).

Let us rejoice that our salvation rests secure in Jesus Christ and not in our perception of the color of some parchment.